



This edition of *Family Matters* presents the keynote addresses and a selection of other key papers from the Institute's very successful Seventh National Conference, held in Sydney from 24–26 July 2000. The Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Jocelyn Newman, opened the conference, the theme of which was *Family futures: issues in research and policy*. Some 363 people attended and there were 121 presentations, including 15 by staff of the Institute.

The conference represents an important opportunity to present the Institute's research to a broad audience, particularly as it is one of the few conferences in Australia that brings together researchers, academics, practitioners, policy advisers and government public servants to talk about research and policy issues in the family area. The conference is also an important means by which the Institute fulfils its role of encouraging and coordinating research on factors affecting family stability and wellbeing. It provides an opportunity for key stakeholders in the development and implementation of family policy in Australia to meet and discuss current research and policy directions.

A comprehensive overview of the conference by the Institute's Professor Peter Saunders and other Senior Researchers at the Institute appears on pp. 3–9 of this issue.

Abstracts of 123 conference papers have been listed on the Institute's Web site (www.aifs.org.au) together with full text versions of 57 papers. The Web is an important way of providing timely access to presentations, especially by those unable to attend the conference.

Changes to AIFS Board

Minister Newman announced the appointment of a new Board of Management for the Institute on 24 July 2000. The Board now comprises the following members.

- *Chair: The Hon. Ann Henderson*, Minister for Housing and Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs in the Victorian Parliament from 1998 to 1999, and Chairman of the International Year of the Family Ministerial Council in 1994.
- *Professor Donald Chalmers*, Professor of Law, University of Tasmania.
- *Ms Dianne Gibson*, Executive Director, Family Services Australia.
- *Professor Alan Hayes*, Head of the Division of Early Childhood and Education at Macquarie University.
- *Ms Robyn McKay*, Executive Director, Family Capabilities Branch, Department of Family and Community Services.

- *Professor Frank Oberklaid*, Director, Centre for Community Child Health, University of Melbourne and Royal Children's Hospital.
- *Ms Louise Staley*, an Industrial Analyst with an interest in family issues.
- *Mr David Stanton*, Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

I very much look forward to working with the new Board as we seek to enhance the Institute's role in conducting research into identifying and understanding factors affecting family and marital stability in Australia.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the retiring Board members – Dame Margaret Guilfoyle DBE, Professor John Mathews AM, Professor Steven Schwartz, and Ms Denise Swift. The Institute has very much benefited from their contribution through the Board and I thank them for their hard work and support. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle has been a member of our Board since July 1992 and Chair of the Board since May 1998, and I have a particular debt of thanks for her personal support and guidance since I came to the Institute in May 1999.

In announcing the new Board, Minister Newman stressed the breadth of experience that Board members will bring to the vital role of the Institute, and the policy focus of the Family and Community Services portfolio.

National Marriage and Family Council

I have been appointed as a member of the Commonwealth Government Marriage and Family Council. The Council, chaired by Ms Pauline Frick, Executive Director of Centacare, Whyalla, South Australia, was established by Senator



The Hon. Ann Henderson, new Chair of the Institute's Board of Management, pictured with AIFS Director, David Stanton

Newman in December 1999. Its charter is to advise government on the effectiveness of marriage and relationship education; to oversee the trial of pre-marriage education vouchers; to assist in the further development of the national family strategy; and to advise on existing research and identify areas for future research in the area of marriage and relationships.

The Council has been contributing to the further development of the Federal Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It has also been examining available research and research needs in the areas of marriage and relationship education, families and work, and resilience in relationships, families and communities, with the intention of making recommendations to the Minister for Family and Community Services on possible areas for action.

Welfare reform

On 29 September 1999, the Minister for Family and Community Services announced the Government's intention to review the Australian welfare system. The Minister appointed a Reference Group under the leadership of Mr Patrick McClure of Mission Australia to consult with the community and to provide advice to the Government on welfare reform.

The Interim Report of the Reference Group was released on 28 March 2000 and the Final Report, *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, was released on 16 August 2000. The reports provide a challenging presentation on how the current social support system could be the subject of fundamental reform.

The issues raised are important to Australian families as the future direction of social protection is debated and reformed. This is an area where the Institute has sought to play a positive role by contributing to informed discussion on a major public policy issue and by highlighting relevant Institute and other research work.

The Institute made a submission to the Reference Group and also prepared a special issue of *Family Matters* (Spring/Summer 1999, no. 54) devoted to the topic of 'Families, Welfare and Social Policy'. Following the successful *Family Matters* issue, the Institute prepared an edited collection of essays titled: *Reforming the Australian Welfare State*. The book was edited by Peter Saunders of the Institute and contains a very interesting discussion of the welfare debate in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The book includes contributions from prominent Australian and overseas academics, as well as people working in the voluntary sector and those employed in Government.

The book was launched at the Institute's conference in July by Minister Newman, who said the book 'provided a timely contribution to the welfare reform discussion'.

I expect the social policy issues involved in welfare reform and associated research will continue to be an area of interest to the Institute, particularly as we further define our research activities in the Family and Society Program.

HILDA survey

The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and the Australian Council for Educational Research, have formed a Consortium and have successfully tendered for the Department of Family and Community Services Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The Melbourne Institute is the lead organisation in the Consortium and the Project Director is Professor Mark Wooden. This is a major project that will involve the development and running of the HILDA longitudinal survey, initially over a four-year period at a cost of some \$7 million. The survey will result in a significant enhancement in available data and will enable the better assessment of social policy changes as they affect families through time.

The Institute is pleased to be associated with this project and will play a key role in the development of the family related aspects of the survey, and in the assessment of the policy relevance of the data to be defined and collected, as well as in the overall management of the project.

Institute staffing

Dr Matthew Gray, an economist with the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University, has been appointed as Principal Research Fellow of the Family and Society Program at the Institute. Ms Violet Kolar resigned from her Research Officer position in June to take up a new position with the Wallis Consulting Group, and Ms Christine Kilmartin has taken leave for two years to work with the Victorian Government Department of Infrastructure. We wish Violet and Christine the best of luck in their new endeavours, and look forward to Matthew joining us in the near future.

